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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Friday, May 9, 2003

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Cassis bill helps recover abducted girl

Senator's Amber Alert bill instrumental in finding Jenna Hart, dozen others

LANSING – State Senator Nancy Cassis (R-Novi), who was instrumental in helping Michigan become one of the first states in the nation to adopt the Amber Alert program into law, is satisfied that the program has already been influential in the return of dozens of abducted Michigan children.

“As the author of the Amber Alert Michigan law, I am extremely pleased to see that this important measure, which put Michigan at the forefront of the issue, has already paid enormous dividends,” Cassis said.

Due to the program, Jenna Hart, a three-year-old abducted in Madison Heights last week was found and returned home within 24 hours. In addition to Hart, five other children in Michigan have been returned to their homes safely in the first four months of this year and a total of 33 overall since the state began using the system.

“For the safety of precious children, it is absolutely critical that word of an abduction is out immediately in the first, and most crucial, 24 hours,” Cassis said. “This program has been an essential tool in doing so, resulting in the safe return of many children in Michigan since its inception.”

Amber Alert is a statewide notification system coordinated between law enforcement agencies, the Michigan State Police, and broadcasters to locate abducted children as quickly as possible. The Amber Alert program began in Dallas in 1997, named after nine-year-old Amber Hagerman of Texas who was kidnapped and murdered in 1996.

Michigan began using the system on a volunteer basis, but when Gov. John Engler signed the Cassis bill into law in December of 2002, the measure required the Michigan State Police to disseminate information to the media upon notice of an abducted child. Companion legislation sponsored by the Rep. Laura Toy (R-Livonia), currently a state Senator, established criteria for the broadcast of information regarding Amber Alert Notice.

President George W. Bush recently signed the bill into federal law. Since the president signed the law, states that currently have an Amber Alert program could possibly be in line for federal funds to improve the program.

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